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REPORT OF THE COUNCIL.*

MAY 24, 1887.

During the last year the Academy has lost by death eight members ; — viz. five Resident Fellows : Charles Francis Adams, Nathaniel E. Atwood, Ephraim Whitman Gurney, William Ripley Nichols, Charles Callahan Perkins ; and three Foreign Honorary Members, Georg Curtius, August W. Eichler, and Bernhard Studer.

RESIDENT FELLOWS.

CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS.

THE roll of our deceased members is headed by the name of one of the most distinguished, — the Hon. Charles Francis Adams. Mr. Adams was born at the corner of Tremont and Boylston Streets in Boston, on the 18th of August, 1807. His father, the late President John Quincy Adams, was then a Senator of the United States from Massachusetts, and Boylston Professor in Harvard College. He successively resigned these posts, and accepted the appointment of Minister to St. Petersburg from Mr. Madison ; and to this place he took his infant son Charles in 1809. Mr. J. Q. Adams subsequently went as Envoy to Ghent and to Great Britain, and during this last mission Mr. C. F. Adams was at school at Ealing, near London. On his father's transfer to the Secretaryship of State, Mr. Adams came to America and entered the Boston Latin School. He graduated at Harvard College in 1825, and afterwards studied law and was admitted to the bar, but never engaged extensively in practice. He was a contributor to various periodicals in early manhood, and wrote on some important political questions in the administrations of Jackson and

* Notices of Curtius, Eichler, and Studer could not be prepared for this volume ; but notices of Richardson and Von Ranke, necessarily omitted last year, are now given.

Van Buren. Though not at all eager for public life, he consented to serve in the State Legislature from 1841 to 1843 in the lower House, and in the upper in 1844 and 1845. At this time he undertook the editorship and chief support of a newspaper in the Anti-slavery Whig interest. In 1848 he accepted the nomination of the Free Soil Party as Vice-President, with Ex-President Van Buren at the head of the ticket. After the election of General Taylor, Mr. Adams was not in active political life till he was chosen to Congress in 1858, and again in 1860. In March, 1861, he was appointed Minister to England by President Lincoln, and remained till released by Mr. Johnson, in May, 1868. In 1871 he was on the Geneva Arbitration Commission. In 1873 he delivered a memorable address on Mr. Seward at Albany. In the previous year his name was much canvassed for the Presidency of the United States, and later for the Governorship of Massachusetts. Towards the end of his life, the effect of his severe anxiety in England was shown by a gradual obscuring of his mind, and he died in Boston on the 18th of November, 1886.

Mr. Adams was chosen a member of this Academy on January 28, 1857, in Class III. Section IV. He was elected Vice-President in 1872, and President in 1873. As such he was selected to deliver the Anniversary Address in 1880, and he had made considerable preparation for it; but finding it a more serious task than he had supposed, his constant reluctance to fall below his own standard induced him to withdraw from its delivery and from the presidency, and for the last six years of his life he lived in retirement.

Mr. Adams rarely took part in our proceedings, and it might be thought, by a superficial observer, that the services he rendered to us were little more than the giving his name as President, the graceful and dignified occupancy of the chair, and that mutual recognition of distinguished men and distinguished societies which always has been and always should be felt as a source of honor to both. I believe the truth to be far otherwise. I believe the work Mr. Adams did for his country is exactly what we need more of in just such associations at this day; and that our younger members, who are full of modern ideas of philosophical and scientific work, may well be recalled by his example to an older and perhaps less common, but none the less noble, conception of the fitting pursuits of a great mind.

The section to which Mr. Adams belonged was that of Literature and the Fine Arts, and therein unquestionably lay his real and favorite tastes. He engaged in active politics, first by his pen and afterwards

by his personal presence, from the highest and purest motives. His father wished him to do so; his fellow citizens cast their eyes on him; his sense of duty to his country and the right deduced that there was political work for him to do. He could no more have refused to work with his pen and his tongue under such persuasions, than he could have shut his ears to a trumpet note, or his eyes to the voltaic arch. His career is a living example of the inherent difference between inclination and adaptation to a special work. He did, and did well, admirably, gloriously well, what it was his duty and his place to do, — what his surroundings and his elements fitted him to do; but his tastes and his wishes were constantly laid aside, suppressed, one might say crushed, in the stern sacrifice of inclination to obligation. In this respect, his career is a most impressive lesson to our younger academicians, — I do not mean members of this Academy only, but our young students everywhere, who fancy they have ended the matter when they say their actual pursuit is one of their own liking or selection. Still more in the character of the work he did, do I believe we find a still closer lesson for ourselves, that we shall do well to ponder.

Mr. Adams's tastes, as I have said, were essentially those of a scholar. His father stated of him more than once, that he was made to be a hermit. He gathered around him a valuable library, even before inheriting the larger and more miscellaneous collection of his father, — and he loved to live in it. His delight was in what is called standard or classical literature, — not merely the classics of the Latin and Greek languages, but those works in all the tongues of cultured Europe that have gone through a process of sifting similar to that through which the ancient classics have passed, — those which their own and subsequent ages have alike found worth keeping. In the perusal of these he was indefatigable. He could settle down in middle life to a thorough course of study with a systematic arrangement of time, a settled purpose of labor, a patient grappling with difficulties, which would do honor to a youth at college, laboring for the scholarship on which his daily bread was to depend, — doubly honorable in a man of wealth and assured social position, who could not easily be called to account for ignorance or indolence, had such indeed been his failings. I find in his diary mention of his studying at the same time Persius, Goethe, Adam Smith, Gallatin, and the Duchess d'Abrantes, a little of each at a time, with careful opinions noted on their respective literary value. In such departments of literature — history, biography, political and moral science, the higher kinds of poetry and fiction — he was never tired of exercising his thoughts, and,

if he felt suitable inspiration, his pen. It was the sort of study that he had learned from his father, and that his father had learned from the great lights of his boyhood, of whom Edmund Burke might be taken as the prince and model. In their steps Mr. Adams was content to tread.

The more modern lines of thought ; experimental science, whether applied to matter or to mankind ; the kind of speculation which aims at discovery rather than development, at criticising rather than confirming ; the subjective poetry and the skeptical theology of the day, — found little sympathy from him. There were principles in literature, in philosophy, in politics, and in religion which were as assured to him as the rules of grammar or the period of the earth's revolution. He was a conservative in the true, not the false, use of the word ; not because he was the least of a coward, or the least averse to reform, but because for him the old had not been exhausted, and he could not see that the mere fact of novelty was any proof of truth. He was at once, like his ancestors, deliberate and careful in his thoughts, ardent and intrepid in his feelings. His opinions were slowly formed, and, when formed, energetically, if need be passionately maintained. His articles in the *North American Review* and his various published addresses will give a good idea of his line of thought and style of expression — simple, clear, firm, dignified. He was drawn away to politics too early to develop his literary studies to the full, but he never lost them.

It would not be doing justice to Mr. Adams to omit mention of two especial tastes which he early formed and always retained. He was a devoted lover of music, — never tired of listening to good performers, with a mingling of enjoyment and criticism rarely found. He was also an eager student of numismatics, and had formed a choice and interesting collection of coins, both ancient and modern. He was never tired of studying this, and found time to perfect his knowledge and improve his cabinet in the busiest hours of his English mission, attending coin sales to the no slight chagrin of the professional dealers.

At the same period he feasted on the great galleries of art, both public and private ; and on Sundays he employed his never-failing attendance on public worship as a means of cultivating his knowledge of sacred architecture, by visiting in succession numbers of the singularly interesting churches that lie hid in the labyrinth of the city of London. It is needless to say that the Palladian style of these edifices appealed to his Congregational instincts far more than the richer Gothic. What-

ever accessory notions he gained, his primary object was to worship, and not to gaze.

In the field of politics, and still more in that of diplomacy, to which a sense of duty, and not inclination, brought him, the work of Mr. Adams, the part that he played in the world, is gratefully remembered. But it is a kind of work that we all are in great danger of undervaluing, because it is not experimental, not discovery, — not what we are urged to do again and again, original work. I confess I am getting a little impatient of this phrase, “the need of original work,” which seems to sneer at everything that cannot be called new, which is never at rest till it has struck out something to send to a scientific or historical magazine, even while still in a crude state, in order to avoid every possible chance of anticipation. Mr. Adams made no discoveries in politics. He probably would not have been the author of any great original treatise if he had remained faithful to literature. He did not in his study compose what in the semi-Teutonic jargon of the day is called an epoch-making book, like the *Wealth of Nations*; he did not in Congress devise a plan which instantly saved North and South from the civil war. He did, it is true, as a publicist, play an active part in opening what was announced to be the new era of arbitration instead of war; but however satisfactory the results of the Geneva tribunal are to us, its precedent has not been followed with eagerness, nor have all nations laid down their arms at the feet of similar arbitrators. But Mr. Adams was called upon to do a work quite as important and not less elevated than the discovery of new moral or political truth, — the assertion, namely, and the maintenance, of old rights and old truths, which were in danger of being forgotten or trampled through national frivolity, or triviality, or brutality. He maintained, at the risk of his political prospects and private friendship, that the wealthy men of the North were sacrificing the liberty of their ancestors to the gains of the hour; he maintained, at the risk of his party connections, that North and South must seek to unite on a reasonable common ground, that would maintain the union and liberty of our fathers amid the passions of the hour; he maintained at the utter sacrifice of his comfort, nay, of his very life, that there are eternal obligations between nations, as old as peace and war themselves, which must not and shall not be forgotten and slighted under any pretence of peculiar circumstances and difficulties. That Mr. Adams should have called Americans and English back to these old principles, that he should have refused to let any new discoveries interfere with eternal right and wrong, seems to me on a level with Galileo's reasserting the Copernican system after Tycho Brahe had attempted to reverse it.

We place Mr. Adams among our great men, not because of discoveries like Franklin's or inventions like Whitney's; not for piercing logic like that of Edwards, nor thrilling eloquence like that of Webster; not for triumphs like Scott's in the field, or Allston's in the studio, not, in short, for some achievement that makes foreign nations say, "The Americans have done something new";—but because his voice and his pen, his acuteness and his firmness, preserved for us that liberty, that peace, and that very existence as a nation without which science and art, logic and eloquence, and all the conquests of war and peace, would be a mockery; and because we owe it to him that the country of Edwards and Franklin and Webster and Whitney is still the country of Allston and Scott, and that the old truths and the old principles still rule throughout the old nation.

NATHANIEL ELLIS ATWOOD.

THE life of Nathaniel Ellis Atwood furnishes an instance of success in scientific pursuits achieved against the serious obstacles of lack of means and of elementary instruction.

He was born in Provincetown, September 13, 1807, the son of a poor fisherman, John Atwood. In 1816, the family, the better to pursue their calling, moved to Long Point, the very tip of Cape Cod.

And here young Nathaniel, at the age of nine, began his service in the open fishing-boat. Already at thirteen he did a man's duty on board a schooner engaged in the fisheries on the banks of Newfoundland, and in early manhood he had risen to the command of the vessel. Soon he changed to the coasting trade, and for some time commanded a brig that sailed to the West Indies. But fishing was his favorite employment, and to this he returned, and continued to pursue it till near his sixtieth year. After leaving the sea he still maintained his connection with the fisheries by the manufacture of cod-liver oil, in which he showed much skill, and which he pursued as long as he lived.

Captain Atwood's mode of life was certainly not one favorable to scientific research. But the love of such research was in him, and he allowed no obstacle to stand in the way. He early began to observe the habits and characteristics of fishes, and to read such books on natural history as he could get. Keen observation and a powerful memory enabled him, as time went on, to accumulate a great quantity of novel information, all of which was placed at the service of Dr. Storer when he wrote his Report on the Fishes of Massachusetts, in